



## Working Lands Alliance

*A Project of American Farmland Trust*

### STEERING COMMITTEE

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Common Ground

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Testimony raising concern about the impact of H.B. No. 5014 AN ACT  
MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE EXPENDITURES AND REVENUES  
FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2013 on the Department of  
Agriculture

Submitted by: Leah Mayor, Project Director, The Working Lands Alliance  
Submitted on: February 15th, 2012

Senator Harp, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations

Committee. I am Leah Mayor, Project Director for the Working Lands

Alliance. The Working Lands Alliance (WLA) is a broad-based coalition of  
farmers, conservation organizations, and food security groups whose policy,  
education, and advocacy work has led to the protection of thousands of acres  
of productive Connecticut Farmland.

For most of our country's history, agriculture has been the foundation of local  
communities and local economies. Today, agriculture in Connecticut is a  
\$3.5 billion industry, employing 20,000 people, and providing \$500 million  
annually in cash receipts. Affordable and accessible farmland is still the most  
critical natural resource to protecting the viability of farms as a cherished way  
of life and a strong agricultural economic base. Accessible farmland is also a  
critical component in food security, environmental protection, and wildlife  
habitat. The integrity of farmland preservation, protection of our agricultural  
resources, and the overall wellbeing of an agricultural sector depends on the  
strength and effectiveness of Connecticut's Department of Agriculture.

The Working Lands Alliance is grateful for the on-going support of Governor Malloy's administration investing in Connecticut agriculture. The State's Farmland Preservation Program has a visionary goal to preserve 130,000 acres of farmland. This program is a linchpin, allowing farmers access to capital to strengthen their farming operations, invest in farm infrastructure, and provide jobs. It also leverages up to \$6 million in matching federal funds. With the average age of Connecticut farmers standing at 57 years old, the Farmland Preservation Program is the principal method of securing affordable farmland for the next generation of farmers. It is also vital to protecting our prime agricultural soils, which require thousands of years to develop and to sustaining wildlife and biodiversity. To date, the state has protected 37,860 acres of farmland, a far cry from its visionary goal.

The recently initiated Community Farms Preservation Program authorized by Connecticut General Statutes 22-26nn and the Farmland Restoration Program (Public Act 11-1) are important steps in securing a land base for the future of farming. Programmatic success, however, will also require departmental staff and time. The Farmland Restoration Program alone, directed to increase the state's farmland resource base for agriculture, is expected to work with over 250 farms.

Agriculture is increasingly viewed as a buffer to rising trends of global disharmony, economic instability, food insecurity, and environmental degradation. Yet, with increasing populations expected to reach 9 billion by 2050 and 70% of fruits and vegetables produced in *urban edged* areas with mounting pressures to develop, we are simultanenously seeing more pressure on our agriculture lands and growing ever more dependant on each acre of farmland. Investment in our farms and farmland is an

investment in preserving a distinct part of American culture and heritage, and a commitment to one of our most precious resources. Our best defense is a strong Department of Agriculture with clear programs that protect farmland and ensure farm viability by providing regulatory oversight, above all, remaining a strong partner to agricultural jobs and businesses across the state.